

PAUN ES DURLIĆ



SACRED LANGUAGE OF THE VLACH BREAD

ILLUSTRATED BOOK AND DICTIONARY
IN 40 PICTURES



Paun Es Durlić

SACRED LANGUAGE OF THE VLACH BREAD

Illustrated book and dictionary in 40 pictures



Balkankult Foundation
BELGRADE
2011.



Bread told me:

I am not food for the hungry or a redemption offering, nothing of the kind! I am a living language of Old Gods which Man spoke at a time when he was close to God; when everyone who spoke the language could become God himself!

Bread told me this as well:

As food, I last but one moment, but as a sign, I last forever, as hope in life eternal!

It was then that I understood the words of Jesus Christ:

*Take it and eat; this is my body!
I am the bread of life; if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of world.
Take it and eat it; this is my body!*

(From an ethnologist's field diary:
"Conversations with Vlach bread")

INTRODUCTION

(Miniature on the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia)

In this illustrated book, we sought to present to a broader public for the first time one aspect of the spiritual culture of the Vlachs of Eastern Serbia, which has survived over centuries in ritual breads and traditions. The most prominent among those is *pomana*, a ritual for which the Vlachs bake hundreds or even thousands of breads!

The material was collected in the framework of project “The Vlach ritual bread and *pomana*”, launched by Paun Es Durlić, director of the Museum in Majdanpek and the only Serbian ethnologist of Vlach origin from Eastern Serbia. This 25 year-long effort included as many as 100 *pomana* rituals, in a form of monograph, observed in 70 Vlach villages out of 160 populated by this population. Out of close to 1000 various ritual breads, we singled out a dozen as well as 30 photographs out of 30,000. The result is a short illustrated review of the Vlach culture which transforms a gloomy and fatalistic world of the dead into a cult of eternal life, using its elaborate rituals to celebrate universal human dreams of eternity!

The area of Eastern Serbia populated by the Vlachs occupies a territory surrounded by four rivers: Velika Morava to the West, Timok to the East, Danube to the North and Crni Timok to the South. In a geo-morphological sense, this area lies at the foot of the southern rim of the Carpathian mountains, extending from Bratislava in the Slovak Republic, across the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine and Romania to Serbia where it unites with the Balkan mountains at the Čestobrodica bend. In Serbia, the Carpathian mountains are intersected by the Danube river forming a picturesque Djerdap Gorge. This enormous mountain chain then turns into idyllic valleys leaving behind mountain blocks of Mt. Miroč, Deli Jovan, Homolje, Beljanica and Kučaj. Porečka Reka, Resava, Mlava and Pek rivers flow through intersecting valleys and gorges; their watersheds do not form only separate hydro-graphic wholes but specific ethnographic areas as well. Several such areas also form valleys Zvižd, Stig and Braničevo in the West, and Negotinska Krajina and Ključ in the East. Major towns of Eastern Serbia include Požarevac, Majdanpek, Negotin, Zaječar, Bor and Čuprija. The towns of Bor and Majdanpek are particularly famous for their mines. The latter's history goes back to the period of Vinča, spanning more than 7,000 years with minor or major interruptions. Due to ore deposits in its neighborhood along with archeological prehistoric metallurgy sites in Mlava, this area is considered a European birthplace of metal when Neolithic Europe momentarily stepped out of the Stone Age. Still, it is not just that archeological metallurgy left its ancient monuments: in the picturesque Djerdap Gorge there is a Mesolithic site of Lepenski Vir, famous for its figurines

and trapeze-shaped settlements. Only a few kilometers downstream there is Vlašac, from which the culture of Lepenski Vir sprang. It was there that a stone sacrificial altar has been recently uncovered with graphisms indicating that the history of alphabet started a few millennia earlier than anticipated!

The Timok and the Pek are gold-bearing rivers. The latter owes its current name to ancient greed for gold. It stems from the Greek word *pekós* signifying “sheep wool”, the oldest gold-recovery technique. Wool used to be placed at river bends to collect gold deposits washed away by natural erosion from the Homolje Mountains. The traces of the *Greeks* from the period of Jason’s Argonauts can be traced in toponyms *Homolje* and *Stig*.

According to historical sources, the oldest tribes in these regions were Triballi, Moesians, Pikenze, Trikorneze, Timahi and Dardanians. Still, so far the science has not been able to prove which of those belonged to the Celts, or Dacians i.e. Thracians or possibly to Illyrians. It was the Celts that brought the Vlach name to the Balkans. The name itself continued to exist independently changing its meaning not only in ethnic but in social sense as well. This complex ethnic make-up was almost entirely Romanized in the period from the 1st to the 4th century. Due to inexplicable historic inertia, Romanization continued even after the break-up of the Roman Empire which gave rise to the Romanian State to the North of the Danube. It was from that area that the Slav tribes pushed through to the Balkans in the 6th century via Eastern Serbia to permanently settle there. In the area of Romanized Thracians, which Herodotus called “the greatest nation in the world after the Hindus”, a Slav State of Bulgaria was created and the Slav State of Serbia to the West. The border between the two States shifted from the West to the East to be finally set in the 20th century along the Timok River in Eastern Serbia. After the fall of the Roman Empire, this part of the Balkans was under the influence of the Byzantium for some time and in the 15th century it was conquered by the Turks which stayed there until the 19th century. In the wake of the break-up of the Turkish Empire, national States as we know them today started to emerge in the Balkans.

Even though from pre-historic times this part of Europe has experienced constant changes in ethnic composition whose causes, duration or contours are sometimes difficult to delineate, it is certain that the current ethnic picture of Eastern Serbia has been the consequence of ethnic, historic, political and economic factors in the end of the 17th and early 18th century. The crucial moment was the Great Serbian Migration led by Arsenije Čarnojević in 1690 triggered by unspeakable atrocities committed by the Turks which almost emptied erstwhile Serbia. The ancestors of the present-day Vlachs were disfranchised paupers, slaves virtually, oppressed by boyars in the Romanian princedoms North to the Danube - Vlachia and Moldova - or under the rule of Austria and Hungary in the area of Banat and Erdelj. Their position was hardly any better in Bessarabia or Dobruja. This class of European

paupers that suffered beyond words supported all other social classes. No wonder then that historic data speak of thousands of paupers fleeing these areas across the Danube to the South, to the area between the Morava and the Timok rivers, especially during the Fanariot regime, which was in power in two Romanian princedoms for more than a century (1711-1811). Serbia itself was so devastated demographically that before the Požarevac Peace Treaty was signed (1718), it had only 4,000 inhabitants including Belgrade (its largest village, Bogatić, had 44 residents!). Subsequent censuses indicate that the Negotin krajina had 33 settlements with 198 families, Poreč nahija had 15 settlements with 60 residents, while Homolje district had 10 settlements with 80 residents and so on! Although these data are largely inaccurate and deliberately doctored with inadequate census methods with population that evaded to be registered, they still present a rather gloomy picture of a sweeping devastation prevailing in Serbia at the time. Occasional travelers described Serbia as “almost entirely covered by forests”.

The settlement of the Vlachs from the North was intentionally encouraged by the Austrian authorities in Timisoara at one point since they were given a portion of Carpathian Serbia after the Požarevac Peace Treaty. According to historical sources, the Austrian authorities sought to “turn newly-acquired states, Serbia in particular, not just into an additional resource to boost military and financial capacity of the Habsburg Monarchy, but to create the States whose population, satisfied with new order and ruler would attract other Christians in Turkey”. Essentially, the plan was to justify the conquest of the Balkan states by an alleged need to “introduce European culture to the Balkan barbarians”. It is no wonder then that the head of the Timisoara administration, Count Claudius de Mercy, personally toured the Banat Vlachs which the Administration resettled to Serbia in 1721 and 1722, oversaw their settlement between the Timok and Kučajna rivers and encouraged them to also entice their relatives to come over from Banat. Encouraged by these policies, the Serbs from the South in Turkish-occupied territories started to settle there in waves. The most important one was in 1737 led by Serb patriarch Arsenije IV. The same Austrian authorities, personified by Field Marshal Friedrich Heindrich, accepted new Serbian immigrants and allowed them to settle in the area of Crna Reka under its authority. Except for justified internal resettlements, interchange and mixing between populations there were no significant ethnic turbulences there save occasional uprisings, rebellions and liberation wars which the Vlachs and the Serbs fought side by side. With the rise of Romanian national sentiment in the territory of the present-day Romania, in the 18th and the 19th century, our Vlachs were no longer there. It was crucially important that these disfranchised boyar subjects for the first time got their land in the Carpathian part of Serbia: they were able to take as much land as they wanted. They turned this wasteland covered by weeds and bushes into arable land of their own and remained there until today. There was no need to go back to heartless boyars and ruthless cokoys, in deed or thought. Rich and colorful Vlach oral traditions make no mention of nostalgia for the old homeland except in rare lyric poems cursing the Danube river for having

separated a brother and sister or sweethearts. Neither the Romanian princedoms, preoccupied with their own domestic problems paid much attention to the escaped paupers except when so many left that they remained almost empty like, for example, in 1741 when according to Romanian historical sources in the wake of the outrageous fiscal exploitation of the Fanariot regime, “more than 14,000 paupers emigrated to the south of the Danube. Many of them hid throughout the territory and thus jeopardized the income to the Treasury and the Porta”. Paupers were perceived as an economic commodity which all feudal States wanted to put their hands on, since waste land was a major blow to their feudal system.

Similar situation prevailed with the Church which cannot survive without its followers. In our case, the Orthodox Church followed its flock, Serbs and Vlachs alike, providing service in their language (in Vlach language in some places even until mid-19th century), but its theological level was at its lowest point since its inception. Such situation prevailed even after the Turks left and this long-standing frailty of the church was certainly one of the reasons that ethnographic freshness in Eastern Serbia has been preserved like nowhere else in Christendom. An even more important element lies in the very structure of the Vlach family in which a woman preserved the freedom of a Thracian woman (as testified to by Herodotus) but still managed to preserve a major role in the ritual life she has had since the matriarchate! (Researchers still come across old Vlach women that two thousand years after the death of Jesus Christ still have not heard of him!).

Little is known about autochthonous population (“starinci”) in this part of Serbia even though according to the Turkish regulations these areas (e.g. in the 16th century) very densely populated. Since science could not offer reliable documents as to their exact number it in the wake of great migrations, they ranked all those who know nothing of their origin as “starinci”! This practice in Serbian science has been adopted by the influential anthropo-geological school of Jovan Cvijić in the end of the 19th century. Still little has changed since then! There were members of “starinci” population among the Serbs and among the Vlachs but compared to the number of newcomers their number was insignificant to leave any visible trace other than in terms of geographic names. It is indisputable, though, that approximately two-thirds of Vlach villages bear Serbian names – which means that they have not been established by the Vlachs (nor that the environment was Vlach). Merely a dozen villages bear Vlach names, whose existence is documented in Turkish censuses before the 18th century. Moreover, the legends on the names of villages hardly make any sense, they are an obvious product of folk wit and indicate that there has been no genuine or full spiritual contact among the “new settlers” and “starinci” population. There are also examples among the Vlachs and Serbs alike that people named their villages after the villages of their ancestors. Mixing people is like mixing any other stuff: a larger element prevails and adds flavor to the entire mix.

On the other hand, the Vlachs themselves are not ethnically homogenous. According to economic activity, they may be divided in farmers who live in the East, in the valleys around the Danube and the Timok and highlanders, cattle-breeders who populate a large portion of the mountainous territory west to the Miroč and Deli Jovan. The lowlanders are called Tărani, since they come from Tara rumânească – the name of a lowland principedom of Vlaška in Romanian (they are actually the Vlachs *proprie dicti!*), while the cattle-breeders are called Ungureani, since their ancestors largely came from the regions under the Ungur rule (Hungarians). Both groups speak an archaic dialect stemming from the Balkan Latin languages (Romance languages). In their absence, over time, this language became an official language in Romania. Tărani speak the Olten language and Ungureani speak the Banat dialect of this language. According to dialect characteristics, there is a special subgroup among the Ungureani that call themselves Munteni; they populate Poreč and Crna Reka and merit attention since ritual breads are best preserved there. According to our estimates, Ungureani form the largest population (close to 47 per cent), the Tărani account for 33 per cent and Munteni account approximately for 20 per cent. There is small number of Bufeni centered around the mining area of Majdanpek. They are Olteni and came to Majdanpek from the Banat mines in mid-19th century. Their youngest generations have been almost totally Serbianized as has been the case in all places where the Vlachs became part of urban population. In addition, there are several villages in Eastern Serbia populated by Vlach Roma, also from the Romanian territories as well as an unknown but a small number of Cincars – Armăna, who melted with the Vlachs in rural, and with the Serbs in urban areas.

The accurate number of the Vlachs cannot be established through regular censuses. Over time, the Vlachs in Serbia became a fluctuating, dual-identity mass which declared themselves mostly as Serbs in censuses placing in the forefront their geopolitical affiliation, i.e. Statehood, over their ethnic background and nationality. (Researchers in the field often heard simple but logical explanations: “I declare myself as Serb since I live in Serbia and not as a Romanian since I don’t live in Romania!). Officially, at the 2002 census there were 40,054 Vlachs in Serbia whereas the number of those that spoke Vlach as their mother tongue before school was 54,726. The largest number of Vlachs recorded in Serbia was in 1895 (159,510) when they accounted for 7.66 % of the population in Serbia. Then their nationality was recorded as Romanian in line with the obligation assumed by Serbia at the Congress in Berlin in 1878 when the respect of minority issues was one of the preconditions for international recognition. On the one hand, it was a legal consequence of the establishment of Romania (unification of Vlachia and Moldova in 1862), which also gained international recognition at the Congress, and the expressed awareness of the Serbian State that the Vlachs were *de facto* a Romanian minority. By the same token, before the Congress of Berlin this population was recorded as the Vlachs in the censuses since Serbia rightfully connected it to Vlachia or its neighboring areas with similar population. A new

turnabout in the census nomenclature emerged in the wake of the Second World War with Yugoslav communists coming out as winners. Their political commitment to restore to the Vlachs the status of a national minority, at least nominally, was flatly rejected by the Vlach members of the Party and a smaller number of intellectuals! Prompted by their example and by the attitude of the Salonika fighters, renowned freedom fighters from the First World War (in an environment where ideological unity required ethnic unity as well), ordinary people no longer declared themselves as Romanians and even less as the Vlachs. Consequently, according to the 1961 census there were only 1339 Vlachs! The present-day number of Vlachs can be calculated on the basis of various demographic and ethnographic parameters (for example, the number of residents in Vlach-only villages amounts to 120,000!). Taking into account mixed villages, urban population and Diaspora, we come to at least 200,000 Serbian nationals that may originate from the Vlach settlers from the first half of the 18th century and later, since the settlement continued into the next century as well.

In the present-day Serbia, a step away from the European Union, a specific community with distinct history and spiritual culture, is seeking an opportunity to enter this great, new world with this culture, jeopardizing as little as possible that part of its identity that distinguishes it from others; both compared to Romania from which its ancestors came or to Serbia in which it invested all its potentials. One small segment of this unusual and rich culture – not to be found elsewhere in Europe – is presented in the Illustrated Book that follows. That is just a jewel in the crown preserved by the Vlachs from the birth of the European civilization, exactly in the part of Europe where this civilization was born.

The Vlach ritual bread lives on, but in the form of an alphabet whose letters are copied while less and less people are able to read it.

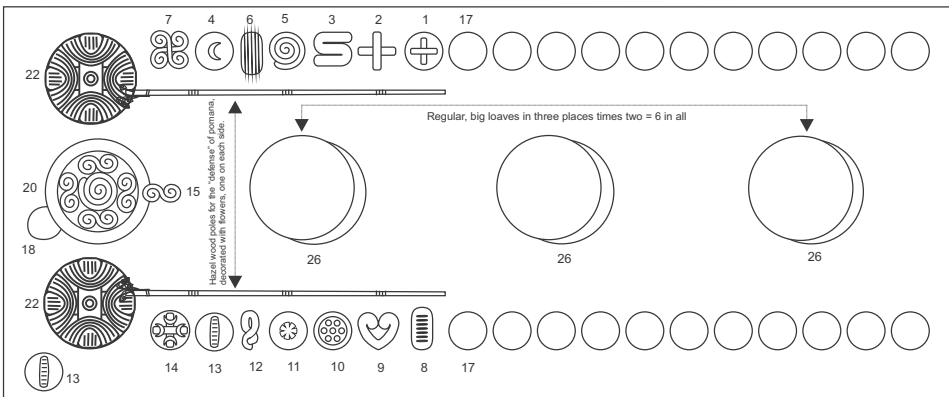
No doubt, after a millennium's existence, the Vlach ritual bread and its pomana tradition have been seriously endangered for the first time by on-going changes in social and cultural life in rural areas. Although it belongs to a small and less known ethnic group that throughout its history was at the social bottom or margins, the Vlach ritual bread carries universal human values, preserved like nowhere in other societies and social groups! It would be best protected if it were placed on the UNESCO list of "Living Human Treasures".



ILLUSTRATED BOOK



Picture 1 – **POMANA** (< Slavic Poměňŭ, “daća”, “parastos”) with eastern Vlachs (Homolje, Poreč, Ključ, Krajina, Crna Reka) takes the shape of a human body in repose, facing eastward. The major part of pomana is “head” surrounded by a proper number of breads, with symbols called **zakuañe** or **trăbuñele** without which pomana cannot “travel” to after-life (Bačevica, municipality of Boljevac, 2005).”.



Picture 2 – On the “head” of eastern pomana there is a basic bread **kapu** (“head”, No. 20), “shoulders” are made up of breads placed at the top of poles (22), on the right “shoulder” there is a cake called **dumñeđiu** (“God”, 13), while on the left and right side according to certain rules, the “laws” are aligned (Laznica, Homolje, 2000).



Picture 3 – **POMANA** with western Vlachs (Zvižd, Stig, Braničevo, Mlava, Resava, Morava) is cone-shaped and is called **kamara** (<Serbian kamara). It is characterized by a large number of breads. The pomana in this picture, consisted of 2622 breads and falls amon **kumînde** – special, luxurious pomana that the Vlachs observe while they are still alive! The word has preserved the original Latin word for daća: **commandare/commendare**. The number of breads is not a coincidence, but the result of many rules that pomana has to fulfill in social, religious and morphological sense (Žitkovića, municipality of Golubac, Braničevo, 2003).



Picture 4 – Three phases of building **kamara** on pomana among western Vlachs reveal its distinct cosmos-like shape, since **kamara** obviously represents a celestial sphere resting on four posts; on the top of the sphere there is Uranium “swastika” revolving around the polar star as if revolving around the “the earth axis”. **Kamara** is also a reminder of an old belief that each of us has our own star, and once the star expires we expire, too (Dobra Voda, municipality of Jagodina, Resava, 2005).



Picture 5 – **KAPU** (“Head”). Pomana bread made of sour wheat dough, baked in a brick oven, called **koptori** (Gornjane, Bor, Porečka Reka, 2008).

Bread is the “head” of pomana (“daća”) with eastern Vlachs and it has an anthropomorphological shape; it is placed at the head of the table covered with ritual breads, which viewed from above resembles a reposing man, the actual deceased person. In the old times, pomana used to be placed in the exact spot where a person died. It was arranged as he laid at that moment. Now they place it with head facing *kîtra rîsarit* (“to the East”), as the deceased is laid to rest in the grave. As head of pomana, it is the function of this bread to lead pomana and prevent it from going “astray” as it travels to the other world where a special deity in charge of distributing pomana will hand it personally to the deceased. At that point, he will be visited by his closest relatives and all deities to whom the breads are dedicated. In the other world, pomana is guided by a loaf in the form of curve called *vîntura* or *razluog*, here placed in the very center of the **head**. The entire

bread signifies a calendar year, as a unit of eternal passage of time unfolding in cycles. That is why it is divided in 12 fields by ribbons representing Sun rays, each with a new moon (*luna cînăvă*) at the edge of each field. The Moon and its phases, from new Moon to full Moon, followed by its disappearance i.e. dying, is most reminiscent of a human fate; a new moon promises the hope of rebirth since it is believed that the God created a man to be immortal. However, the birth is not to be in this world and it has no biological character of Eastern religions reincarnation – in which thanks to numerous and very elaborate funeral rituals, each deceased Vlach will start his eternal life as a *small king*! Since the time immemorial, there is a belief that only prominent people, those occupying high positions, have a chance of becoming immortal...



Picture 6 – Eastern Vlachs call this type of *daća pomana în cînăvă* (“laid out, elongated”). It is prepared throughout the entire funeral cycle beginning on the day of burial (“*țara*”), on the first Saturday, forty days and six months after death. It ends with first-year *pomana* which is then repeated every year or every odd year, until seven or nine cycles expire. At each anniversary, the number of “heads” increases so that a seven-year *pomana* has seven “heads” which belong to the deceased. The eighth head is meant for all other deceased ancestors to which group the deceased himself will go upon expiry of this deadline. According to some, it is the time when “*rupe gurmazu*” (head separates from body) while according to others he just squats below a jug.



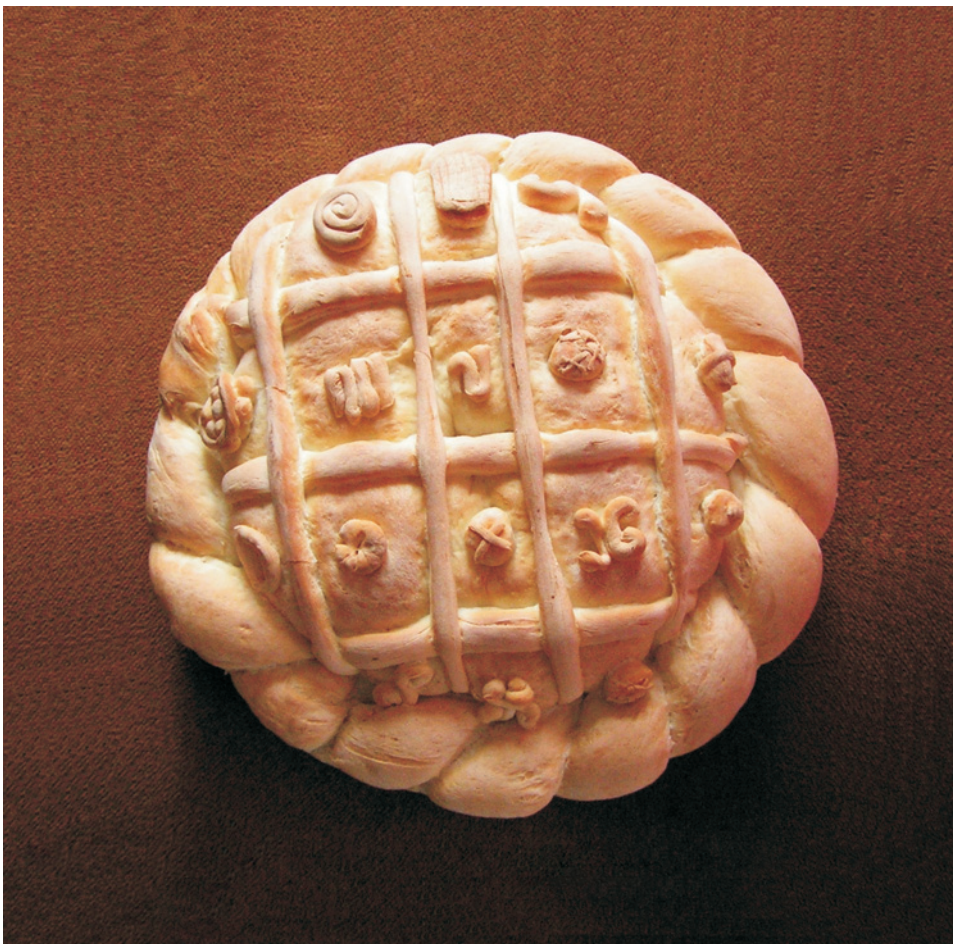
Picture 7 – **KOLAKO-L NUMARAT** (“numbered” loaf, “rosary”). This bread is made of sour wheat dough, mixed with water and salt, oven-baked in a flat pan (Selo Osnić, municipality of Boljevac, Crna Reka, 2005).

This bread is dedicated to those who died in “the dark”, without holding a lit candle. It contains 15 sokoćela – symbols representing some of the major Pagan gods like Sun, Moon, Guardian of Heaven or days of the week (in line with the Vlach traditions, the days enjoy the protection of seven planets known in the Old World). The breads are sacrificial offer so that the deceased “is taken” out “of the dark” and brought to light, some kind of pastoral heaven. There are other accessories to assist the “transition”, for example, *scissors* that the deceased uses to cut the funeral shroud (“pokrouť”) to free himself like a fetus from the womb; *the chain* connecting the heaven and the earth which at the same time represents some old death deities; *a ladder* for the deceased to “climb” to Heaven, like Rao ladder; *the hand* that takes the pomana etc. Swastika (“kokija”) called *Luşafur*

(<Lat Lucifer “the light-bearer”, planet Venus or Danica in our parts) – the main symbol in the Vlach death cult since it is seen as personal light which the deceased carries in his hand as he goes through the Kingdom of Darkness to the other world. Throughout his eternal stay in that Kingdom, the deceased Vlach is under the protection of this sign! There are also *furși* pomîntului (“earthly rake”) in the shape of a tree preventing the Earth from falling into abyss. The spiral-shaped sign is *Vîntura* (“Wind”, a female form of the wind demon *Vîntu*), a special deity called *Razluogu pomeîni*, which “arranges” *pomana* and carries it from this world to another to hand it to the deceased. Among the Vlachs, *Vîntura* is also a trance demon, the condition most similar to death itself. The name of the bread stems from numbers and numbering, which is essential in a complex system of Vlach *pomana*, because only if everything in *pomana* is there, particularly the deities called *zakuaîe*, *trăbuîe* or *sokoce*, *pomana* can ensure a two-way passage from this to another world which is one of its major roles. And these worlds are just two aspects of immortal eternity dreamt about by all human beings!



Picture 8 – Ritual *nîmeîntu* (“dedication”) of *pomana* consists of censuring in circles, touching and naming each object on the table and praying that the deceased should receive all of it at the moment of “dedication”. Only after this ritual, can *pomana* become a holy table and the deceased may approach it. Censuring is done “backwards (from left to right), contrary to how it is done at *Slava*, since the deceased should be “returned” to this world. (Jasikovo, municipality of Majdanpek, Gornji Pek, 2007)



Picture 9 – **KOLAKU RAJULUJ** (“Heavenly Cake”) Pomana. Made by bakers according to rural tradition models (Crnajka, municipality of Majdanpek, Porečka Reka, 2007).

The Heavenly Cake is dedicated to the deceased who died *în negura* (“in the dark”) and contains 16 laws which should facilitate his transition to the Heaven. In addition to traditional symbols like the Sun, Moon, days of the week etc., among the laws there are also creatures from the Christian folklore: *Maika Priasistă* (“Mother of God”), *Aranželu* (“Holy Archangel”), *Dumneđiu* (“Our Lord”), etc. They are represented by round breads to which one, three or four small crosses are affixed. Special laws are intended for sin redemption (*strimbataće*) and administration of justice (*direptaće*) which is considered the highest law in the other world. The bakers added poles in mid-section and a braid encircling the bread which is always round-shaped. In addition to the bread’s emphasized solar character and the layout of laws, which without the poles would remain unclear since applications merge during baking and lifting process. The purpose of these bread additions is

to increase the price of bread. Still, the industrial bread production has taken over brick-oven home bread-making tradition, being cheaper and faster. Moreover, those breads look better than those made at home. On the other hand, bakers do not have enough time or knowledge to fully honor complex and intricate language of bread symbols which is why these symbols are gradually disappearing or ritual breads are made according to old patterns but routinely without any awareness of their true meaning and purpose. Still, the baking industry does their best and cannot possibly be expected to be a guardian of traditions.



Picture 10 – The worst thing that can befall a man on his way to eternal life is to embark upon that road without a candle in his hand, because the after-life is engulfed in darkness. That is why a dying man is closely watched. It is considered a great sin on the part of the living not to light a candle at the moment of death and help the dying man to hold it in his right hand until he expires. If that were not possible for whatever reason, the relatives are required to make a special candle as soon as possible. It is called “big” or “heavenly” candle and it should be sent to the deceased in the process of dedication so that he may free himself from eternal darkness! Until mid-20th century, this candle was made on the eve of funeral and was carried at the head of a funeral procession. Since the making of this candle is complicated and has several stages, it can be made only by a special kind of women, deeply committed to the cult. There is less and less of such women, and that is why those candles are today made for the 40-day pomana. According to the belief, that is the moment when the deceased crosses over the log to the other world. The candle is placed at the head of pomana and lit at the beginning of pomana ritual with a request that it “takes” the deceased to the Heaven (săl petriakă-n raĭ). (Village Brestovac, municipality of Bor, Crna Reka, 2007).



Picture 11 – **KOLAKU LU KRAŠUN** (“Christmas cake”). Christmas. (Jasikovo, Majdanpek, Gornji Pek). Made by bakers according to the ethnologists’ drawing from the field, 2000).

The bread in this picture is baked at Christmas time for the health and prosperity of family members in the next year, so that cattle and plants may bear fruit and land and pastures flourish, in short – for overall progress (“*sî ȕa tot înainće*”). The cake depicts the world vertically divided in three parts (the under-world, this world and the upper world) and horizontally in two (“this” and “that”). All the worlds are opposed to each other. When the Sun rises in this world, it sets in that world, and the dead are getting ready to sleep. They wake up when the day in this world “goes back” and that is the reason that pomana is never observed in the morning, because the dead are asleep at that time and cannot be in attendance. The spiral elements found on terracotta breads from the Vinča culture are preserved in the same number and order (6th - 4th millennium B.C.). An example of such Neolith bread, depicted in picture 12, has been unearthed in Kremenjak site in

the neighborhood of Potporanj village, municipality of Vršac and has been exhibited in the archeological collection of the City Museum of Vršac. The only difference is a double cross which replaced prehistoric rhombs. All ornaments of the Christmas bread can also be found on funeral breads in Gornji Pek. Medium right spiral is decorated with seven notches made by knife on fresh dough. It represents seven days of the week under the influence of seven celestial bodies known in the Old World: *luń* (Moon, Monday), *marť* (Mars, Tuesday), *mřercurĩ* (Mercury, Wednesday), *juoĩ* (Jupiter, Thursday), *vińiri* (Venus, Friday), *sĩmbĩť* (Saturn, Saturday), *dumińik* (Sun, Sunday). The small bread with these symbols is called *vumoř*al. Even though the origin of the word is unclear, this bread is sometimes also called *frumoř*al. ("beauty") presumably for homophonic reasons. The residents of Gornji Pek give it away before pomana and eat it because it "is good for beauty" ("*bun ři frumoř*añ"). It falls within a group called *razloug* or *vĩntura* in other parts, and its role is to be in the forefront of pomana as a human substitute on the road to the other world. The motifs from this and after-life intertwine, because the other world is not only the world of the dead but of the divine creatures and forces that shape this world and rule human destiny in all its aspects.



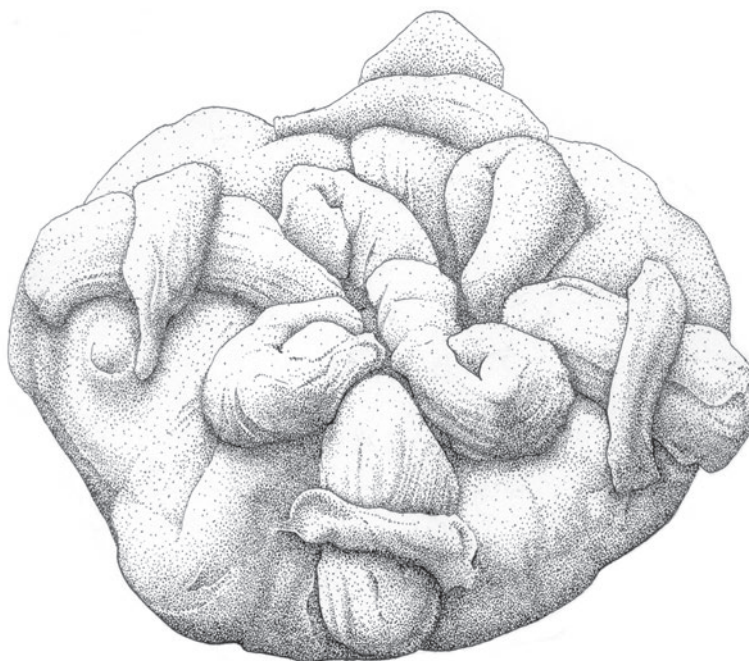
*Picture 12 – The symbols carved in the clay model of Neolith bread from Kremnjak site in the vicinity of Vrřac. Compared to the bread from Jasikovo (Picture 11), the Vlach bread has a double cross instead of rhombs. It is presumed that the rhombs were created in prehistoric times by stylizing bent swastika ends. Both breads have the same number of spirals, arranged symmetrically along the vertical line, i.e. along the horizontal line in the case of the Vlach bread. Peripheral notches in this Vinća terracotta can also be found on some Vlach ritual breads: they are called **numarature** ("numbers") and are made by knife on fresh dough. The number of notches is 365 and a half, the number of days in a year according to "old women's" calendar.*



Picture 13 - **MUOŠĪ** ("Ancestors"). Pomana, Leskovo (Majdanpek, Gornji Pek). Bakers' replica on the basis of ethnologists' field sketch, 2001.

This ritual bread has two intertwining ancient symbols: "swastika" ("crooked cross, "kokija") and a cross with four new moons at its ends. Its name *muošī* ("the elderly", "ancestors"), points to the role of pomana in this case: it is intended for the deceased's ancestors who are invited to his pomana, to help themselves to the offerings and assist him to settle in the new world. Kokija, which has a central place on the cross is in some places called *sviči Pjetri* ("St. Peter"). That is why we conclude that this universal symbol – swastika (Sanskrit *su-asti-ka*, su "good" and asti "to be") – in addition to being the deceased guide and torch-bearer also played a role of a door-and key-keeper at the entrance to the other world and a judge in the world of the dead, since in some Vlach tales it is St. Peter that decides where the deceased should go: the heaven or hell. Swastika may well be the symbol of the dead since this is one the oldest symbols in human history! We recognize some of sacral roles of swastika in myths and legends regarding St. Peter, whose name

swastika took under the influence of Christian folklore. A cross with new moons is an ancient representation of a dead person and a new moon should enable rebirth. While dough is still fresh, Vlach women carve 11 notches on each half-moon - a total of 44 - the number of “great days” in a year, according to one belief. Since in a quarter of a century we failed to find anyone who could tell us what the “great days” are, it is presumed that this is a reduplication of number four, which in the Vlach culture and many other ancient cultures represents a supreme God, the Master of Universe, “from the East to the West, from the North to the South”. In view of the fact that Romanian word *moş* is linked to the Dhacian substrate and the scientists found it in the Dhacian God Salmoksis (or Zalmoksis), it is possible that these breads preserved hypostases of this great God worshipped by ancestors of the present-day Vlachs? According to Herodotus “people do not die but are summoned by God Salmoksis”, who claimed that “neither him nor his guests or their offspring will not die but would go to some place where they will live forever and enjoy”.



*Picture 14 – **Mouş** from pomana from Rudna Glava (Majdanpek, Gornji Poreč). The cross with half-moons represents the deceased, while swastika (luşafur) placed at his chest has a role of reviving him in the after-life.*



Picture 15 – **KOLAKU DI BÎT** (“Pole cake”). Pomana, Rudna Glava (Majdanpek, Gornji Poreč). Bakers’ replica on the basis of ethnologists’ field sketch, 2006.

This round bread has a ring and decorations in the inner-field. All Vlach breads with a ring (*šerk*, *gardin*) are considered “great” or sacrosanct in the religious sense, since the ring represents a holy nimbus generated from the Sun aura. In the history of religions, it has been represented in the images of the Babylonian gods. In addition to swastika (“*kokiře*”) which occupies central place in this bread as well, there are four symmetrically placed spirals, called *razluogu* or *vintura* whose role is to take pomana to the deceased, in any of the four cardinal points. Between them, there are four symbols of Latin letter S. The ornaments actually represent half of swastika, derived in the course of long-standing ritual practice. There are several meanings in the cult of the dead with Vlachs of Gornji Poreč. Due to its twisted shape it is called *strimbataće* (“a curve”) and it is presented as a sacrifice for the deceased’s sins in life. In other parts, it is called *sîmbîta*. It is dedicated to Saturday, as a week day of the dead. As of late, pomana are increasingly observed

on Saturdays. Previous pomana days, Tuesdays and Thursdays, are observed in case relatives can get a day-off from work since employers are not under the obligation to honor pomana requests. The bread is dedicated along with a pole (Picture 16) which each deceased person receives with pomana. In the old days, the dead were buried with those poles. Much earlier, poles did not serve to protect pomana it is believed today. Instead, it has been introduced in this ritual as insignia, an honor bestowed upon the deceased as they enter another world! This stems from the semantics of the entire ritual whose purpose is to provide a high social status to the deceased in the new world, which is a precondition for eternal life. Pole has been one of the oldest symbols signifying such position. The pole became insignia at a time when early cattle-breeding societies stratified and when cults, myths and religious representations surrounded sorcerers and tribal chiefs. Strangely enough, these have been very well-preserved with the Vlachs.



*Picture 16 – Handle of the pole from pomana in Jasikovo (Majdanpek, Gornji Pek, 2007). The pole has been decorated by **kondijanje**, a drawing technique with hot-wax cinder. To the right, there is a “cosmic tree” scene, connecting the two worlds together with its height. Its annual rebirth raises hopes of the deceased being born again and that is why he carries it on his funeral insignia.*



Picture 17 – **KAPU** (“Head”) Pomana, Loznica, (Žagubica, Homolje). Bakers’ replica on the basis of ethnologists’ field sketch, 2000.

In addition to ring (“*gardin*”) which places this bread in the category of “great” and assigning to it the holiness of Sun, it has a spiral *vîntura* in its center, called *buzdogan* (“Club”) with four surrounding “S”-shaped curves meaning that the head will lead pomana to all four cardinal points in search of the deceased. Breads from the kapa group are not placed directly on the table. Instead, two regular breads are placed underneath (Picture 18). Only in case of large pomanas, more breads are placed underneath, when there is a lot of guests and not enough space. There should always be enough bread for each man not only at the table but also to take home. The Vlachs, the same as ancient Egyptians, are very generous in food offerings for their dead since the deceased will get as much food in the other world as has been eaten at pomana. And he will receive food only if people eating bread occasionally say *bobdaprost* (“God forgive”) and mention the deceased

man's name with sorrow (This is important for guests themselves since those who get carried away with food and drinks and forget to praise the deceased, may be intercepted by the deceased on their way home who would take away the bag with breads given away in his honor!). Underneath all those breads, they used to place a small corn bread as well, called *malaï* by the Vlachs. This tradition has been preserved by the lowlanders where corn is a major crop. The corn bread dough is decorated by forks. The name *kapu* ("head") actually consists of three carefully chosen breads, which reflect an ancient triad in which all important deities to the deceased and his eternal life live in upper, Uranium part of the three-part cosmos. The representations of the "lower" world differ among the Vlachs. Sometime there are conflicting or excluding, which testifies to their different origin and age. Rural culture does not even up religious differences nor excludes outdated contents from religion. Only those things that have purpose and importance to life of men in villages persist since self-sufficient economy cannot deal with excessive luggage. That is why the idea of funeral rituals has been so deeply embedded in rural tissue. And so, when we peel away the thousand- year old religious layers, with the Vlachs we find still freshly preserved idea of after-life world which is neither "Up" or "Down" but at the same plane with our unique and unrepeatable worldly life!

Picture 18 – *KAPU POMENÍ* ("Head of pomana") with *vrumoşâl* cake on top.



*A three-part "head" composition on pomana in Krivelj, represents a triad world. This photo was taken by ethnologists in the field in 2008. At the top, there is vrumoşâl bread, which "leads" the entire pomana to after-life. It is the only bread kissed in a dedication ritual. As a rule, each object sent to the deceased, from food to furniture, should be **touched** by hand ("point"), named ("describe") and **kissed** ("verify"). For sanitary concerns, the Vlach women confined food-kissing only to symbolic kissing of this most important bread.*



Picture 19 – **KAPU LA POMANA ALBĂ** (“Head of white pomana”) Gornjane (Bor, Porečka Reka, 2008). Bakers’ replica of a photo made by ethnologists in the field.

During the White Week on the eve of Easter Lent (“*Puostu pariăsîmilor*”), the Vlach prepare a special daća, called *Pomana Albă* (“White pomana”). It is being observed in the first three years of a seven-year post-death cycle. It is also called *pomana skumpă* (“Expensive daća”), due to its alleged power to place the deceased in Heaven, in case he – for whatever reason – failed to get there immediately after the funeral. Most of ancient Vlachs, especially highlanders, imagine Heaven as a meadow in a far-away forest. The meadow is divided in two parts – one is dark, cold and waterless, covered with withered and black grass. This is for those who died without a candle. Once all proper rituals are observed for them, including white pomana, they pass over to the other part of the meadow, full of scented flowers which the deceased get as present with every pomana. In the middle of the meadow there is a huge tree with a cold water spring underneath. This is the only place where the deceased can ease thirst, unbearable in the other world. Each

deceased person shall be entitled only to the quantity of water “released” when a little boat made of wood (*Cucurbita lagenaria*), with candles arranged in the shape of cross, lit as the wood drifts away along the brook (Picture 20). It is not believed that Sun could reach this part of the meadow, although there is a belief that there are days and nights, and it is by funeral songs – *petrekaturama* – that the deceased is instructed not to go after water in after-life, because water does not come back, and to follow Sun, since it rises every day and can bring people back to life. Still, it is very light in Heaven and the light comes from many candles burning in pomanas observed by the living in honor of their dead cousins. This bread represents one of the meadows in Heaven. Seven kernels represent days of the week which, interrupted by death start again in eternal after-life. There is a solar aura around them awakening nature after the winter slumber. White pomana serves to bring the deceased into a cycle of all-round change of nature, to whose chthonic part from now to eternity he belongs.



Picture 20 – Releasing a *trok* (“boat”) downstream is the most important part of “releasing” water, a part of every pomana. The longer it flows downstream, the more water for the deceased in the other world, where in addition to eternal hunger and cold, there is an eternal thirst (Rudna Glava, 2006).



Picture 21 – **KAPU** (“head”). Pomana, Zlot (Bor, Crna Reka). Bakers’ replica on the basis of field photo, 2008.

The picture depicts one variation of Head prepared in the wake of pomana observed one year after death when mourning clothes are taken off and the period of mourning ends. In the past, black clothes were not usually worn in the period of mourning. Some people still remember that white used to be the color of mourning, in addition other mourning signs like not wearing hats, not shaving, letting one’s hair loose and avoiding to wear jewelry. Black was not worn for practical rather than religious reasons. The clothes of ancient Vlachs were made of sheep wool, hemp and flax, all white. Only with the invention of *karaboša* (copper sulfate), was it possible to permanently color clothes in black, which coincided with the tragedies in world wars. The Vlach women even today take off black clothes to perform pomana rituals which indicates that wearing black is a more recent tradition. Once they complete the rituals, they put black clothes back on. White is a solar color, the color of light which is very necessary in the “Heavenly” function of pomana rituals. In the solar disc of bread from Picture 21, there is a left-turning

swastika, in reverse, contrary to the movement of Sun since it should return the deceased from the other world to this one, so that he could also end mourning and embrace life in full, along with his living cousins. In addition to swastika, in all fields between swastika's arms there is a spiral *vîntura* (in Zlot with Christianized name *prieskura*), on its left there is *lanțu*, from the times when Gods or demons of death were “snatchers” and captured human souls in nets, chains, loops, ropes or similar traps. In the upper left, there is *fluarîa*, a flower, whose role in the cult of the dead is very important since it is believed that only the scent of flowers in addition to a funeral song can permeate the other world and tempt the deceased to come to pomana no matter where he is or what he does at the moment. In the upper right field, there are two back-to-back “fire-steels” generated from swastika like many other sacral symbols in the Vlach culture. Here, they represent some kind of key for the passage through the gate between this world and the other.



*Picture 22 – The same as his relatives, the deceased is in the period of mourning for one year after death. The mourning period ends on the first anniversary of death on which occasion a “reel for the soul” is performed (see picture). In some areas, like Poreč and Crna Reka, there are pomana with big fires called **privegî** (picture 28), with people dancing around them until small hours. The more people come from various quarters, the more respect will the deceased receive in the new society where he will spend his life in joy and happiness, similar to privegî. The role of the deceased, the reel-leader is assigned to his cousin of the same gender, resembling the deceased by height; earlier, he used to carry a torch with the name of the deceased, and these days he carries a picture of the deceased (Rudna Glava, municipality of Majdanpek, Porečka Reka, 2004)*



Picture 23 – **KOLAKO-L MIK** (“Small cake”). Pomana. Made by bakers (Ljesnica village, municipality of Kučevo, Zvižd. Field photo, 2007).

This bread has a shape of left-turning swastika within a holy aura. It is called a small cake because on *kamara* (Picture 24) it is placed under cake *îndoite* (“double”) with three half-swastikas (S-shaped), also within similar ring. The importance of swastika in the Vlach culture is not seen only by its main role in the cult of the dead but by many variations generated from it which over time with the cult’s development, acquired a separate name, independent role and a special meaning. Some of these signs were independently used as early as in Neolith (Picture 38).

The illustration below: *some of independently used symbols in Vlach breads were generated from swastika; the first drawing from the left in this row.*





Picture 24 – **KAMARA** on pomana in Ljesnica in Stojadinović family (field photo, 2007. In the back, A. Repedžić, a student, project associate).

The type of pomana with “kamara” has a pointed Uranium character since bread representations of after-life deities are elevated to the “celestial” level. Seven small breads in the front of kamara represent seven days of the week. Days are units of eternal time, whose existence in this world is interrupted by death but since they are under the protection of seven planets, bread sacrifice moves them forward and they continue to go on in eternal after-life. The Vlachs embraced a *fatalistic* concept of life. The same as in other archaic cultures, it was believed that fate demons determine a man’s fate at the moment of his birth as well as his life’s end and the form of death. Fate is determined according to days and their number is recorded by *konđeļ* in the Book which has only white and black pages. That is why, when a man dies, no condolences are offered in fatalism. People just sigh and say: *Şe sǎ faş, n-a mǎi avut ǧiļe* (“Well, what can you do, he had no days left!”). The only way to “extend” his days is to regularly observe pomana: a man actually dies once he is forgotten and any trace of him is lost!



Picture 25 – **PUPÎĐA** (“Hoopoe”) Pomana, Aleksandrovac (formerly Zlokuće, Negotin, Krajina). Made by bakers, 2009.

Anthropomorphological bread called *pupîđa*, or *papuša* (“Doll”) known in a wider eastern Vlach area. In some parts of Romania it has a role in wedding and birth rituals. It has variations in northwestern Bulgaria in terms of figure. In Gornji Pek it was used as a gift to departing guests. It was part of ritual breads and pomana, but not any more. It appears, even though rarely, in pomana in certain villages of Crna Reka in the vicinity of Bor. It is best preserved in the ritual practices of Timok villages – Aleksandrovac, Kovilovo and Crnomasnica. Its role is to carry

pomana to the deceased and to help him *s-o radiŭe d'e p'e masă* (to lift it off the table). It is used in a special ritual, one day after pomana, when the relatives gather together again for lunch (prîndu). At the end of the ritual, three widows (Picture 26), dance around a special table, holding platters with this bread in which a white candle has been inserted. On the platter, along with the bread, there is a bunch of flowers, sweets and fruits. The widows move slowly from left to right and sing these verses: *La raŭ, suflete, la raŭ, | Bagă sama kuŭ m-ŭo daŭ, | Kă la poarta raŭului | Șed'e floarŭa soareluŭ, | Și mirosu florilor!* (To Heavens, soul, to Heavens, Be careful to whom you give funeral feast Since at the Heaven's gate there is a sunflower smelling sweetly.) Once they are through singing, the widows stop, stomp three times, exchange platters, make the sign of the cross and start walking to the right this time, uttering the same verses. After the third round, they put down the platters with *pupîda*, and start tasting each meal and drink, knocking each dish with kitchen utensils until they reach the kitchen where they start banging at the pots and pans with ladles to "warn" the deceased that his pomana is on its way and get ready to take it from "the hands" of a person that performed the dedication ritual, called *bođaprost*. No matter how old the deceased was at the moment of death, he cannot start eating food alone; he is like a small baby who can eat only when someone alive takes a gulp of soup for him, or chews food for him or drinks from a cup. The Romanian ethnologists are of the view that *pupîda* has been inherited from the ancient times of pre-historic hunters when it was believed that a human soul resembles a bird. The Vlach *pupîda* is an anthropomorphological form of ornitomorphological name with a special function of "after-life service".



Picture 26 – Three widows at pomana in Aleksandrovac, shortly before “*pupîda* dance” whereby the deceased is not only sent pomana to Heaven but also “servants” who should help him set the table. In many ancient religions various sculptures were buried along with the deceased to perform “after-life services” for him. There used to be several hundred such sculptures buried in ancient Egypt.



Picture 27 – **ARPIUARĂ** ("Little wing"). Pomana, Slatina (Bor, Crna Reka). Made by bakers, 2007.

In many Vlach areas, people still believe that the deceased goes to the other world as *zburatuorî* ("flyer"), a wide-spread belief that prevailed in the past. People used to say: "*Ăl muort sa fașe înzir și zbruară*" ("The deceased turns into angel and flies away"). That is why the feet of the deceased were not covered once he is put in a coffin. By the same token, pomana, which has the form of a human body, with bread "head" turned to the West, is not closed at the feet in the East: the breads are aligned along both edges of a table, while the middle stays empty to enable pomana to "walk" since it has a long way to go to reach its deceased, represented by his double. In one part of Crna Reka, special breads are made whereby a double curve has a "hat" in the shape of Greek letter Ω or woman's curly hair. It is called *arpiuară*, a diminutive of *arpîe*, which means a wing. It follows that the role of the bread has to do with flying. There are nine of those at pomana, aligned on the table from the head down, five on the right and four on the left side, like pomana has wings to fly. In Vlach oral traditions there is no mention of a soul able to fly like a bird; that concept has been developed circumstantially from the name of the

bread called *pupîda* (Picture 25) as well as the fact that the Vlachs plant a fruit tree on the graves, so that his bird-like soul may rest after it flies around the buried body. Still, in both cases there may be other explanations. Or, such beliefs are somewhat more recent because according to old Vlach beliefs human soul does not leave the body since a man continues his after-life in the same shape he was at the time of death. This *animatistic* concept is rather rare in current representations of ancient cultures. It is almost completely gone or barely survived. In the Vlach world, *animatism* is so emphasized that it forms an entire ritual practice in the cult of the dead, rightfully considered one the most inclusive and diverse in the present-day Europe.



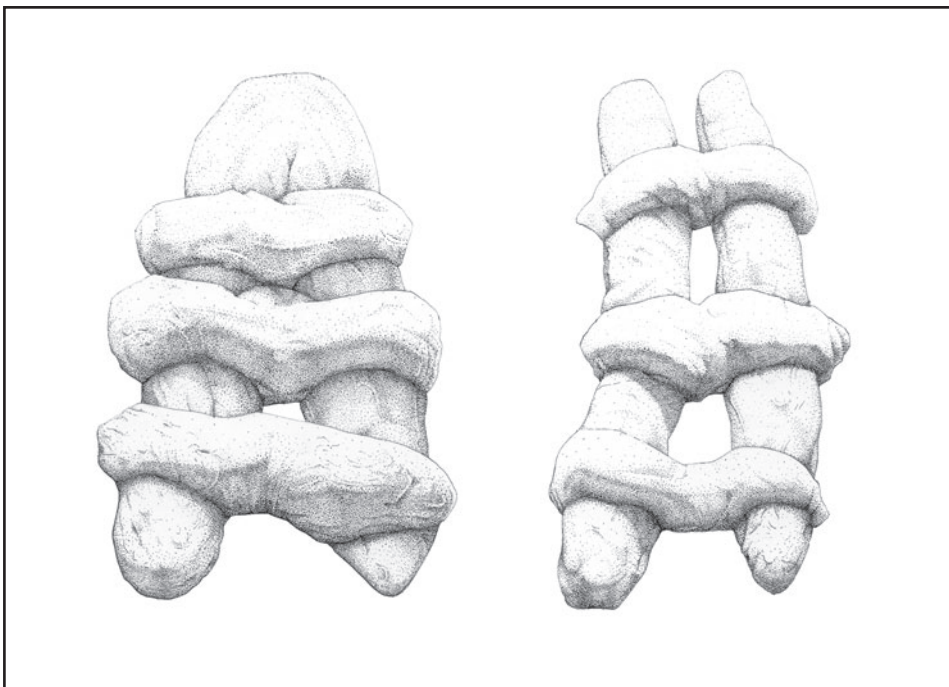
*Picture 28 – The belief in dark, cold and waterless after-life world is of Lunar origin, old as human race itself. It is rooted in Paleolith, a time when man was in constant search of food, life was short and ended abruptly, before old age could set in. The impression was that a man just fell asleep while his soul as an organic double left for another world for good. It is an unsettling thought that a deceased will spend eternity in darkness and cold, and that is why they the Vlachs build a big fire called **privegî**, usually for the seventh, last pomana which marks the end of a death cycle. Privegî is currently observed only by highland Vlachs, since it requires a lot of wood which is lacking in the lowlands. (Rudna Glava, municipality of Majdanpek, Gornji Poreč, 2006).*



Picture 29 – **KĹĹĹARAĹULĹĹ** ("Heavenly Key"). Pomana, Laznica (Źagubica, Homolje). Home-made, 2002.

The Vlach beliefs regarding after-life are very complicated, ritual system is complex and objects, particularly made of dough for eternal life seem to have been limited only by human imagination. The Vlach say that aluvatu jukariĹa babilor ("dough is old women's toy"). Everything is rather simple when a deceased embarks "upon the road" with a lit candle in his hand. His most recently deceased cousin who has already passed along that road, carrying bread sacrifice baked by his family, easily passes over the log to heaven. He reaches the heaven keepers, stops for a moment before the SomoĹiva who sits on a stone throne and compares his life with what had been "inscribed" in the book at his birth. In the end, he passes through Heaven's Gate. He is welcomed there by Holy Mother who wakes up "all saints" upon his arrival to open the gates for him and to accompany him as he tours Heaven... Nevertheless, if one dies without a candle – in which case seven neighboring houses will be put to shame – he will experience a lot of hardships as he moves around in darkness or in the best case will be escorted by a whimsical white-bearded old man. He will then have to fight off the attacks of Jadca in an attempt to cross over the log and experience many trials and tribulations before he reaches the Heaven's Gate where he might be compelled to wait for days and plead before a deity would take pity on him and open the gates for him...

Such an ill-fated man is therefore given a key-shaped bread at pomana, resembling an old-fashioned key, so that he may unlock the gates himself. Judging by this key, those gates resemble roughly cut doors built by the Vlachs on their wooden sheds, mountain lodges or watermills. And so the representation of Heaven as a meadow now gets a gate suitable to shape and structure!



Picture 30 – **SKARUȚĂ** – ladders used by the deceased to climb to Heaven are also – like the basic concept of after-life – inspired by immediate natural environment and experience from everyday farmers' life. For example, the ladder on the left side, is an old contraption that the farmers were able to build even in the most primitive circumstances of suitable wood, with horizontal bars made of thick branches bound by smaller branches. Ladders on the right are somewhat more complicated and those required more sophisticated tools than ordinary axes. They could take you to greater heights. Three horizontal bars reflect a three-part world. No matter how big those worlds were, the deceased could easily reach them with this simple contraption. Many ancient cultures mention ladders: Gods Seth and Hor personally held them for the deceased in ancient Egypt; in the Bible, they appear in the visions of Job as his connection to the God; Veda harvester climbs the ladder on the way to Heaven, in miter mysteries they had seven horizontal bars, Buddha climbs down the ladder to offer his teachings on the road to salvation ... At the "beginning" of time, we find them in Heaven when a man communicated with God directly, but they were lost once a man became sinful! The picture shows ladders from pomana in Laznica (municipality of Žagubica, Homolje), which were given to the deceased in 2002 and 2004 since he died "in darkness".



Picture 31 – **PROSTAŠUŇE** (“Farewell cake”), Pomana, Gamzigrad (Zeječar, Crna Reka), Made by bakers, 2008.

A deceased Vlach begins his *traŭu đī vešiŭe* (“Eternal life”) bathed and dressed in new clothes. On the road to eternity, he carries only a few personal possessions and food, placed in a colorful *trastu* (“Bag”), placed over his arm as he is laid in a coffin. He is attired properly but modestly as though he is going to visit a relative for a few days. Forty days upon his death, or one year at the latest, he shall have a tombstone erected for him, like *kasa đī vešiŭe* (“Eternal House”) equipped with all household appliances: table, chair, bed, bed linen, cutlery, toiletries, wallet and money to pay his debts, hand watch or chain watch, mirror, comb, water containers and similar items. He is also given a new suit since the one he has been buried in either got dirty or worn out. He is therefore given all those things that any living man would need if he were to live elsewhere... He is also being given his suit he wore for work because the belief is that the deceased will not sit there idly. Water and food is sent only temporarily after his death. When the deceased is given furniture, special breads are made as well, which differ in shape depending

on the region, but with the same function: to enable the gifts to find their owner! There are usually four of those, to cover all cardinal points. In one part of Crna Reka they have an anthropomorphic shape (Picture 31), resembling reverse fire steels generated from swastika at this time representing a gate to the other world or a key with a power to open the gate! Only the sinless pass easily through those gates. Still, there are not too many sinless people if at all and therefore all of them have to pay for redemption. Only after an offering is made – in the form of such bread – a man can receive the gifts! Still, principal ritual expressions with *prost* – like *prostîtu* (*să sa*), *prostaskă*, *prostaşuie* or *bogdapruost*, *bobdapruost*, *bodapruost* – did not have the current meaning of blessing for the “redemption of sins” in the history of folk religion, but were in the phase of transition from animatism to animism, a magical formula with a dramatic ritual purpose: to help the soul leave the body in after-life. It is only with animism that body is considered as “prison of the soul”.



Picture 32 – Bread *prostaşuie* in the ritual of furniture dedication and dining utensils at *pomana* in Gamzigrad, 2008.



Picture 33 – **ŠAPĆE KUOTURĬ** (“Seven angles”), Pomana, Laznica (Žagubica, Homolje). Home-made, 2000. Right: symbols from the back of an Egyptian scarab placed on the deceased chest at burial.

The representations of after-life in the Vlach tradition are undoubtedly very old. Had they not been materialized in ritual breads, they would probably have been lost over time and committed to oblivion as has been the case with other Balkan cultures. Researchers are often genuinely excited when they realize that what we see in the Vlach ritual traditions today can only be found in ancient Egypt scripts, Arian Vedas, Iranian Avesta, Old Testament, in short, in cultures that vanished long ago. So, for example, a basic symbol from which the largest number of symbols derived is “Sanskrit” swastika. The oldest traces of swastika were found on mammoth bones from late Paleolithic age (Mezin site, Chernigovskaya region, Ukraine, dating back between 25-17 000 B.C.) On “seven angle” bread, we see one swastika element, in the shape of Latin letter “S”, which forms a closed circle of seven elements connected by hooks. This is topography of after-life. According to the shape of the bread and accompanying rituals, we learn that it is septagonal, corresponding to cosmos and universe! The bread is presented to the Keeper of Heaven as an offering with a request that all seven quarters of the Heaven are searched and a deceased found whatever quarter he may be in at that moment. This is for a man who died without a candle. His relatives are aware of his precarious situation and believe that he should be elsewhere, instead of being pushed to some dark corner. The guard is asked to take the deceased to the gate of heaven and

let him go back home, where a great pomana is prepared in his honor. Looking at these symbols, we seem to be going back to the ancient Egypt for a moment. According to their tradition, there were “seven houses in the underworld, with three times three times seven doors”. In addition, our “*kokija*” seems to have been taken off the back of the Egyptian scarab (Picture 33, right), a symbol of eternal life. By placing it in the coffin on the deceased chest was intended to ensure his rebirth in after-life. Pointing to similarities between elements of the Vlach and Egyptian culture, which can be found in several places in this Illustrated Book, is not a mere decoration of a comparative method. Further in-depth analysis could provide proof to historical hypothesis for such similarity, since the reflections of the Egyptian religion, as one of the most powerful and longest-lasting among the ancient Mediterranean religions continued in the Middle Ages through Thrace and Roman civilization. We consider that it is not necessary to prove that these two civilizations represent two distinct components of the Vlach ethno genesis.



Picture 34 – Ritual carrying of breads, candles and other sacrificial offerings, in a three-part circling around privegi fire, to the tune of a death-song sung by five elder women. Unfortunately, the man died without a candle in his hand and the singers plea with the Guardian of the Heaven to take him out of the world of darkness and help him to come home to pomana; that will give him light and warmth and the Guardian will then be able to take him to Heaven (Laznica, municipality of Žagubica, Homolje, 2000).



Picture 35 – **VOŇÍŠESK VOŇÍŠESK** (“Male”) Pomana. Zlot (Bor, Crna Reka). Home-made, 2008.

Swastika, whose elements represent four annual positions of constellation Ursa Minor as they have been perceived according to the polar theory by the ancestors of Indo-Arians, in this case has an additional arm. Old women from Crna Reka believe that this changes its gender. It now has a male attribute and a new function. It is no longer a light, guide or key but a guardian that watches over funeral table, called *masa* or *astalu*. This is a special table set independently from pomana, sometimes in another room. It is intended for the deceased himself as opposed to pomana which he shares with his dead relatives or neighbors. When all layers of the Vlach cult are removed, this “astal” seems to be some sort of a holy table with a deceased person sitting there as a prince, king or God, ready to welcome all deities necessary to confirm his new status. Under the light of a triple swastika, in

the company of selected immortals, the dream that the deceased has had since he appeared on the Earth finally comes true: to become immortal and live eternally in heavenly bliss! The road to Heaven – according to Vlach old women – is possible for everyone who is familiar with the magic of bread and the holy language of its symbols! Perhaps science should change its vocabulary and instead of speaking of the cult of the dead when referring to the Vlach culture it should speak of the cult of immortal life, as an everlasting wish of every man!



Picture 36 – Science is faced with a great challenge of explaining the genesis and strata of the pomana complex in the Vlach culture, including the question as to how all of it survived in its original form since the time immemorial until today. The Vlachs are Christians, but the Church influenced rural representations of after-life only superficially, mostly through folklore since the Church does not speak Vlach and the Vlachs do not speak Church Slavic language. It would appear that it has to do something with the fact that women take care of the cult of the dead: their role is irreplaceable and it would be a sin not to allow them to perform those rituals the way it was passed on to them by their mothers and grandmothers or from wise old women in their villages. Priests are only rarely invited to read at pomana since their services are expensive and pomana is already a huge expenditure for a household. If priests are called these days, they perform their services and leave and then women take over doing things that have been done from time immemorial; any changes to the ritual may take place if they allow it or submit to it. In this picture, we see a pagan-Christian religious syncretism, a more frequent scene at the present-day Vlach pomanas! (Vlaole, municipality of Majdanpek, Gornji Pek, 2003).



Picture 37 – Traditions are passed on orally, through teaching that starts at an early age with Vlachs, when girls are introduced to the cult through “freeing” the water ritual. There are other ways of teaching the cult which includes drawings, written instructions or sound recordings. Pomana is a complex system of organically linked symbols sometimes coupled with elaborate myths on the outlook, designation or position at the table. The same as alphabet has its rules, so the language of ritual breads has its rules which once violated negatively affect pomana (“pogovorĭesk pomana”) and it cannot cross the borders between the two worlds, guarded by Gods. Allegedly, insulted Gods do not wish to read writings or cannot understand it! Modern bakers introduced confusion in this holy language: they have taken over to make “letters” from old women, but they can make them only according to someone else’s design! For them and for the sake of keeping them committed to memory, Vlach women use notebooks. In this picture we see pages from a notebook kept by a Vlach woman from Vlaola (municipality of Majdanpek, Gornji Pek, early 21st century).



Picture 38 – A table with symbols uncovered on approximately 1000 fragments of pottery and figurines from the Vinča culture (6th – 4th millennium B.C.), when Europe finally stepped out of the Stone Age and entered the Metal Age. On the basis of interpretations offered by an archeologist Marija Gimbutas, these symbols became known in science as the “Vinča alphabet”. The alphabet was systematized by her follower Shan M.M. Winn while Romanian scientist Sorin Paliga prepared them as a font for computer systems. All symbols painted in yellow and listed below the table are found on Vlach ritual breads in eastern Serbia. Some similarities may be a coincidence in some cases but not in all. Graphisms like swastika, sun, crescent moon, regular and leaning crosses or spirals may be traced in archeological documents in many epochs and cultures which followed successively after Vinča in the Balkans. The merger of silent and distant Vinča culture and the living culture of the Vlachs, we may learn a lot about both cultures including those that were emerging and disappearing in this part of Europe in the meantime. There is an ongoing scientific debate whether Vincha graphisms were alphabet or ownership marks. In this sense, Vlach breads speak in favor of alphabet but not the one used to exchange messages among people – we consider that in the Vinča society there was no need for that – but that it was a holy alphabet used by the Vinča people to plea with their Gods! No doubt, some of these Gods are still alive and immersed in the after-life of Vlach Pantheon!



Picture 39 - The author of project "Vlach ritual bread and pomana", ethnologist Paun Es Durlić (Rudna Glava, 1949), director of Museum in Majdanpek – on a photo taken on 15 September 2007 on pomana in Debeli Lug, his seventieth since he started research in 1984. For a quarter of a century he recorded one hundred pomana, by himself or with his associates. His research team included Miroslav Balabanović, Borivoje Krčmarović and Anica Radovanović, who stayed longest with his team. Significant contribution to gathering materials was made by Zoran Ilić. All of them were at some point employees of the Museum in Majdanpek, including Aleksandar Repedzić, a student. Even though it started as a project of local character in the territory of the municipality of Majdanpek, after initial comparative research in neighboring regions and the fact that the Vlach bread was almost totally ignored by science, it has been decided to expand to project to entire region of Eastern Serbia and to include as many Vlach settlements as possible. In the beginning, they used drawings, notes and photographs. With video cameras pomana were recorded. The materials were computer-processed using the software developed by this author himself. Several hundred pomana have been documented with close to 30,000 photos, while video and audio materials were recorded on 140 CDs. Two documentaries on this topic earned renowned prizes at ethno festivals. There are more than 1000 sketches of ritual breads and they are currently being categorized. In view of this, it may be considered that the Vlach bread is one the best documented topics in Serbian ethnology! Moreover, in addition to preparing an outstanding ethnological monograph, this author has developed an idea on the Museum of Vlach ritual bread and placing the breads and pomana ritual on UNESCO list of "Living Human Treasures"!

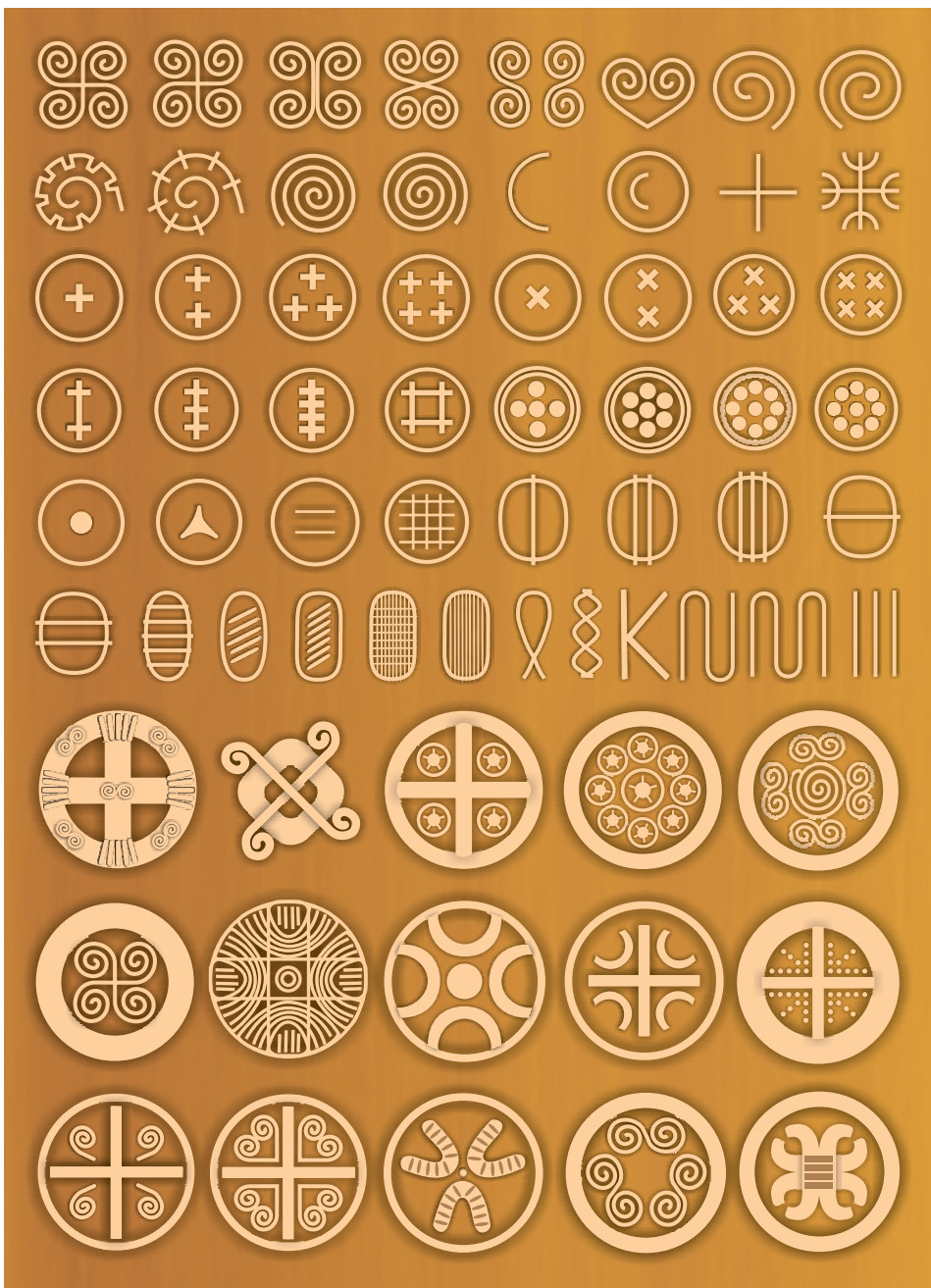


Picture 40 – Map of eastern Serbia with sites related to project “Vlach ritual bread and pomana”, researched in the period from 1984-2009.

Vlachs (Rumiṇi) live in eastern Serbia between the rivers of Morava, Timok, Danube and Rtanj. They speak an archaic dialect of Romanian, since they separated from the Romanians before they were established as a modern nation. Geographically, they may be divided in eastern and western (Line 2), and according to language and other ethnographic characteristics into three groups: Ungureani (Banat) to the west of Line 2; Munteni, close to Ungureani, between lines 2 and 3, and Tărani (Olteni) east of Line 3. Olten ancestors were farmers, while Munteni and Ungureani ancestors were cattle-breeders. Ethnic composition of this part of Serbia was formed in the end of the 17th and early 18th century, when migration of the Vlach settlers from the present-day Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Bulgaria ended. In censuses they register as Serbs, Vlachs and Romanians and that is why it is difficult to determine their exact number. It is estimated that along with Diaspora there are more than 200,000 of them. Until 2009, the project encompassed 70 Vlach villages out of 160 in which the Vlachs form majority and one Serbian village for the sake of comparison between Vlach pomana and Serb daća. Due to financial constraints, all regions have not been processed to the same extent. Still, on the basis of gathered materials, it can be concluded that the tradition of ritual breads has been preserved best in Homolje, Gornji Poreč and Crna Reka. Two kinds of pomana have been identified: one with “kamara” and the other one with “heads” and the border between the two has been marked by line 1.



Picture 41 – Pomana No. 100 within project “Vlach ritual bread and pomana”. The photo was taken on 12 September 2009 in Rudna Glava (municipality of Majdanpek). It was prepared by local residents Mihajlo and Dara Makulović in their lifetime. Trumpet players were commissioned for pomana as well. The festivities began at the cemetery, with the decoration of “eternal home” of the hosts. The festivities ended at the village square with a lot of residents joining the celebration. As though nothing has changed from the times when Herodotus described how Thrace cried when a baby was born and how they buried people “dancing and celebrating, happy that the deceased has nothing to worry about any more now that he is going to be committed to life eternal”. The Vlachs who preserved many elements of Thrace culture organize such pomana festivities believing that the joyous atmosphere from pomana will be easily transferred to the other world and last throughout the entire after-life. Such pomana are called **săfîndar** (Romanian – sarandare, modern Greek σαραντάρι, forty-days after death) by Carani; **kumînd** (Latin commandare) by Ungureani, and **pomana di vîlăţă** (“daća for the living”) by Munteni. In fatalistic cultures, and almost as a rule in rural areas, demons of Fate determine a man's life depending on their current mood and it cannot be changed. Pre-destined fate will take its course no matter what a man does and it cannot possibly be changed. On the other hand, a man can influence his after-life, if he believes there is one. A Vlach, as a true relic of fatalism, prepares “kumînd” or “sarindar” to take over his destiny in his own hands; he now assumes the role of Fate and utters the following words as he pours thyme and wine over his grave: “May my days in heaven be as this day for eternity!” Then he gives an offering to God, a special bread asking to keep pomana for him before he gets there! And all those participating in this strange celebration sincerely wish that this does not happen too soon. No matter how idyllic Heavens may be, everyone wishes to stay in this world as long as possible.



Picture 42 – Schematic drawing of some Vlach ritual breads from the records of the Museum in Majdanpek. In the upper part of the table, the names of the breads are as follows: *zakuañe*, *trăbuiafe*, *sokočafe*, *kokiñe*, *buskomiañiñe* or *ikuañe*. The number of “laws” on pomana is not the same in all places. There may be three to nineteen on one table, and sometimes even up to 25 different symbols at the same time. In the lower part of the table, there so - called big breads – *kapiçe* (“heads”), *kolaş di bit* (breads dedicated with a pole) and others.

LITERATURE

SERBIAN – CYRILLIC ALPHABET

- ВИШИЋ Марко, *Енума елиш*, Нови Сад, 1994.
- ГРУЈИЋ М. Радослав, *Прилози за историју Србије у доба Аустријске окупације (1718-1739)*, СКА Споменик, ЛП, Београд, 1917.
- ДУРЛИЋ Ес Паун, *Култи мртвих као основа за одређење религије Влаха*, Етно-културолошки зборник, 1, Сврљиг, 1995, 232-240.
- *Покладни њивеи – обредна вайра из култи мртвих код Влаха источне Србије*, Етно-културолошки зборник, 2, Сврљиг, 1996, 110-115.
- *Небеска шела и обред „маријурја“ у култи мртвих код Влаха североисточне Србије*, Развитак, 213-214, Зајечар, 2003, 122-147.
- *Рајска свећа у култи мртвих код Влаха у источној Србији*, Развитак, 209-210, Зајечар, 2002, 124-143.
- *Власиц – васкрс њојољеној археолошкој локалитети*, Развитак, 217-218, Зајечар, 2004, 4-10.
- ЕЛИЈАДЕ Мирча, *Слике и симболи*, Сремски Карловци-Нови Сад, 1999.
- ЈАНКОВИЋ Сава, „Помана алба” - „бела гаћа”, Развитак, 2, Зајечар, 1971, 91-96.
- ЈАЊАТОВИЋ Љиљана (прев.), *Pi Vega*, Београд, 2007.
- ЈОВАНОВИЋ Коста, *Нејоштинска крајина и Кључ*, Београд, 1940.
- ПАВЛОВИЋ М. Драгољуб, *Аустријска владавина у северној Србији (од 1718-1739.) њо ѡрађи из Бечкој архива*, Београд, 1901.
- РАДЕНКОВИЋ Љубинко, *Хлеб у народној мајици балканских народа*, Хлябѣт в славјанската култура, Софија, 1997, 145-155.
- ТРБУХОВИЋ Војислав, *Индоевропљани*, Београд 2006.
- ХЕРОДОТ, *Историја*, Нови Сад, 1988.
- ЧАЈКАНОВИЋ Веселин, „Пушпање воде“ о Великом чејврѣку, О магији и религији, Београд 1985, 209-243.

SERBIAN AND CROATIAN – LATIN ALPHABET

- BANDIĆ Dušan, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, Zemun (Beograd), 1989.
- BUDGE Wallis, *Egipatska religija*, Beograd, 1985.
- CERMANOVIĆ-KUZMANOVIĆ Aleksandrina, SREJOVIĆ Dragoslav, *Leksikon religija i mitova drevne Evrope*, Beograd, 1992.
- CRNOBRNJA Adam, *Kulturna imena rimskih žižaka u Gornjoj Meziji*, Beograd, 2006.
- GANGĀDHAR TILAK Bāl, *Arktička pradomovina Veda*, Beograd, 1987.
- GREVS Robert, *Bela boginja, istorijska gramatika pesničkog mita*, Beograd, 2004.
- *Grčki mitovi*, Beograd, 1987.
- ELIJADE Mirča, *Istorija verovanja i religijskih ideja*, I-III, Beograd, 1991.
- FLORA Radu, *Dijalektološki profil rumunskih banatskih govora sa vršačkog područja*, Novi Sad, 1962.
- IONS Veronica, *Egipatska mitologija*, Opatija, 1985.
- JAKOB Hajnrh Eduard, *Šest hiljade godina hleba*, Beograd, 2009.
- KRIM Kit (ed.), *Enciklopedija živih religija*, Beograd 1992.
- KUPER K. Džin, *Ilustrovana enciklopedija tradicionalnih simbola*, Beograd 1986.
- MATJE M. J. *Staroeegipatski mitovi*, Sarajevo, 1963.
- MILER Maks, *Osnovi vedske civilizacije*, Beograd, 2005.
- NEDOMAČKI Vidosava, *Arheologija Bliskog istoka*, Beograd, 1978.
- NODILO Natko, *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata*, Zagreb, 1981.
- OCETEA Andrej (ed.), *Istorija rumunskog naroda*, Novi Sad, 1979.
- PREPREK Stanislav (ed.), *Gilgameš*, Sarajevo, 1975.
- RADUŠKI Nada, *Nacionalne manjine u centralnoj Srbiji. Etničke promene i demografski razvoj*, Beograd, 2007.
- SPASOJEVIĆ Dejan (prev.), *Ardavirafname – knjiga o pravednom Virafu ili raj i pakao u mazda-ističkoj religiji*, Beograd, 2005.

- ŠAFRANSKI Vlodimjež, *Religiozni običaji, obredi i simboli u Staroj Evropi*, Religiozni obredi, običaji i simboli, Beograd, 1980, 285-322.
- ŠAH Idris, *Orijentalna magija*, Beograd, 1989.
- CHEVALIER Jean, GHEERBRANT Alain, *Rječnik simbola*, Zagreb, 1989.
- TILOH Vitold, *Religiozni obredi i simboli Bliskog istoka i Judaizma*, Religiozni obredi, običaji i simboli, Beograd, 1980, 213-282.
- VISKOVIĆ Nikola, *Teze o štapovima vlasti*, Politička misao, XXXV, Zagreb, 1998, 165-169.

ROMANIAN

- BĂLTEANU Valeriu, *Dicționar de magie populară*, București, 2003.
- GHINOIU Ion, *Carările sufletului*, București, 2004.
- *Comoara satelor*, București, 2005.
- EVSEEV Ivan, *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale*, Timișoara, 1994.
- KERNBACH Victor, *Universal mitic al românilor*, București 1994.
- KLIGMAN Gail, *Nunta mortului - ritual, poetică și cultură populară in Transilvania*, Iași, 1998.
- MARIAN Simion Florea, *Înmormântarea la români*, București, 1995.
- ROSSETTI AL., *Istoria limbii române*, I, București, 1986.
- ȘANDRU Dumitru, *Folclor românesc*, București, 1987.
- TALOȘ Ion, *Gândirea magico-religioasă la români*, București, 2001.
- VĂDUVA Ofelia, *Pași spre sacru*, București, 1996.
- *Magia darului*, București, 1997.
- VULCĂNESCU Romulus, *Mitologie română*, București, 1985.

RUSSIAN

- БАГДАСАРОВ Роман, *Свастика: священный символ. Этнорелигиоведческие очерки*, Белые Альвы, Москва 2001.

BULGARIAN

- BACEBA Валентина, *Обреди хлябове при погребение*, Хлябът в славянската култура, София, 1997, 94-113.
- ГРЕБЕНАРОВА Славка, „Оня свят” за българи и власи - измислица, надежда или цел, Българска етнология (извънреден брой), 95, София, 1995, 159-168.
- ЯАНЕВА Станка, *Хлябове с брачна функция в обреди при раждане и смърт*, Етно-културолошки сборник, 1, Свръхиг, 1995, 203-208.
- ПОПОВ Димитар, *Тракология*, София, 1999.
- *Богот с много имена*, София, 1995.

FRENCH

- MASSON Emilia, *Le combat pour l'immortalité. Héritage Indo-Européen dans la mythologie Anatolienne*, Paris, 1991.

ENGLISH

- GIMBUTAS Marija, *The Civilization of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991. (Cult and Religion in Pre-Christian Times — Europe from 7000 to 2000 B.C.)
- SHAN Winn M. M., *Pre Writing in Southeastern Europe: The Sign System of the Vinča Culture ca. 4000 B.C.* Western Publishers, Calgary. 1981.
- WILSON Thomas, *The swastika, the earliest known symbol and its migrations with observations on the migration of certain industries in prehistoric times*. Washington, 1894 (2nd ed.: 1896).

Paun Es Durlić

SACRED LANGUAGE OF THE VLACH BREAD

Illustrated book and dictionary in 40 pictures

www.paundurlic.com

Published by

BalkanKult foundation

Belgrade

www.balkankult.org

Editor-in-chief

Dimitrije Vujadinović

Translated by

Marija Čikeš

Designed by

Paun Es Durlić

Design consultant

Branko Strajnić

Photo No. 1 taken by *Miroslav Balabanovic*, No. 22 *Borivoje Krcmarevic*, No. 20 *Dragan Jacanovic*, project associates, while the other photos were taken by the author. Drawings 14 and 30 were made by *Anica Radovanovic*, curator of the Museum in Majdanpek. Bread replicas on photos 9, 11, 13 and 19 were made after the sketches of ethnologists by *Dragisa Radulovic* and *Zoran Mucuc*, bread specialists in “Stole” bakery owned by Nenad Radulovic from Crnajka; breads on picture 15 and 17 were made by “Delija” bakery owned by Vlastimir Stevanovic from Majdanpek.

Cover photo by: Borivoje Krcmarevic, documentlist of the Museum in Majdanpek, “Circle ritual dance around fire for the dead in Blizna“, Rudna glava, Porecka reka, 2004.

Back cover photo by: *Jaakko Heikkilä*, Finland, “In dragon’s bakery”. Photo taken in Krivelj, municipality of Bor, eastern Serbia, 2007. (Project: “The Vlach world: uncovered culture”. Partners: BalkanKult Foundation Belgrade and the Museum in Majdanpek).

The author is deeply grateful to *Vića Mitrović*, *Vladan Nikolić*, *Novica Vanucić* and *Vidojko Djordjević* whose financial contribution allowed the publication of this book. Moreover, a special acknowledgement goes to *Dragomir Dragić* who suggested and actively promoted the English edition of this work.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

393.95(=135.1)(497.11-18)

DURLIĆ, Paun Es, 1949-

Sacret Language of the Vlach Bread : illustrated book and dictionary in 40 pictures / Paun Es Durlić ; [translated by Marija Čikeš]. - Belgrade : Balkankult foundation, 2011 (Beograd : Elektronski). - 53 str. : ilustr. ; 25 cm

Izv. stvr. nasl. : Свети језик влашког хлеба.

Tiraž 100. - Bibliografija: crp. 52 - 53.

ISBN 978-86-84159-29-0

а) Обредни хлебови - Власи - Србија, североисточна
COBISS.SR-ID 188568076

